Global Classrooms®
Washington, DC
Learn. Live. Lead.

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Strengthening Global Governance for the Sustainable and Safe Use of Outer Space

GLOBAL CLASSROOMS DC
SPRING 2026 MODEL UN CONFERENCE

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE: UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS),was first established in 1958, as an ad hoc committee, in response to the emerging **space race** between the Soviet Union and the United States. It was established as a permanent committee in 1959, quickly becoming a core part of the Cold War era wrangling around arms control. It currently administers five treaties related to governance of space, most notably the **1967 Outer Space Treaty**, which is considered to be the foundation of international space law. It is also supported by the **UN Office of Outer Space Affairs,** which works with individual member states on the legal and technical aspects of space issues.

COPUOS

SPRING CONFERENCE: Policy Advisors

Policy Advisors are subject-matter experts who support delegates during the conference. They do not participate in debate or voting, but they can provide guidance to help ensure your ideas and resolutions are realistic and grounded in real-world policy.

How Can You Use Policy Advisors?

Delegates are encouraged to actively consult Policy Advisors throughout the conference:

- **Opening Briefing:** Advisors will begin with a short introduction to the topic and key policy considerations.
- **Q&A Sessions:** You will have structured opportunities to ask questions about feasibility, policy context, and real-world applications.
- **During Debate:** You may submit written questions or, if allowed, yield speaking time to a Policy Advisor for a response.
- **Unmoderated Caucuses:** Advisors can help you refine ideas, identify potential allies, and strengthen draft resolutions.
- **Resolution Feedback:** Before submission, you may ask Advisors to review your proposals for clarity, feasibility, and impact.

Policy Advisors are a resource—use them to strengthen your arguments, test your ideas, and make your resolutions more effective.

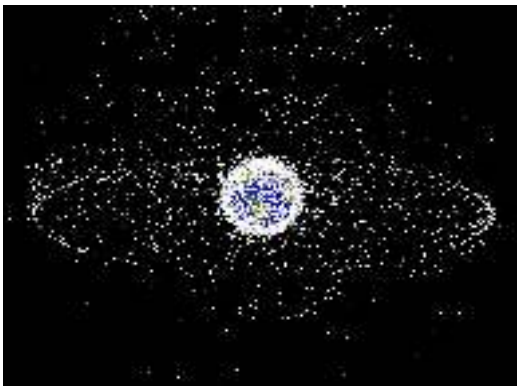
Statement of the Problem:

The amount of both civilian and military activity in space has increased dramatically over recent years. In 2024 alone, a record 259 launches deployed 2,695 satellites[1] into Earth orbit — compared to just 586 objects launched in 2019, and 134 in 2012.[2] This rapid expansion poses several inter-related problems that **existing international institutions were not designed to handle**. ***To start of with,*** the legal framework surrounding civilian activities in space has not kept up with technological and economic change. As the number of objects in space, and the range of activities in space, has continued to increase, existing regulation appears increasingly inadequate. There is no equivalent to air traffic control to track objects and prevent collisions, and **space debris** has proliferated, making operations in space more dangerous.

In an absolute worst-case scenario, scientists predict that it could create **Kessler Syndrome (pictured below)**, a self-sustaining reaction in which debris collides into spacecraft, destroying them, and then the debris from those collisions collides into more spacecraft, repeating until large swathes of orbit become completely unusable. The lack of concrete "rules of the road" creates issues with **Space Traffic Management** and legal ambiguities around **space mining** could

[1] Satellites do things like provide **GPS navigation, weather forecasting, TV and internet signals, and Earth monitoring**. They are built and launched by **governments (like NASA or ESA), private companies (like SpaceX), and sometimes universities**, and their use of space is coordinated internationally by the International Telecommunication Union to avoid conflicts in orbit and communication signals.

[2] Satellite Industry Association, *Historic Number of Launches Powers Commercial Satellite Industry Growth*, May 13, 2025, https://sia.org/historic-number-of-launches-powers-commercial-satellite-industry-growth.



exacerbate international conflict. Additionally, the increasing military activity in space raises the specter of an arms race, in which major powers compete with one another for military superiority in space, and access to space resources, with potentially dire effects for international security and governance of space.

Secondly, the governance architecture around space is fragmented. No single international body has both the authority or mandate to regulate space as a whole. **COPUOS** operates by consensus and can only produce voluntary non-binding guidelines. The **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**, facilitates international connectivity and assigns satellite orbits and radio frequencies so countries and companies can effectively utilize space without interfering with each other but has no mandate over safety or debris.[3][4] The **Conference on Disarmament**, which addresses space security issues, has been functionally gridlocked for decades due to persistent disagreements among member states that prevent consensus on starting or advancing formal negotiations. [5] Also, binding international law treaties, such as the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, among others, are outdated and do not adequately address ongoing space and security issues. ***A third*** and related challenge is the changing composition of spacefaring counties. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, space was the exclusive domain of two superpowers. Today, over 80 countries have operated satellites, and operating satellites are registered in 105 countries or multinational organizations.[6] Increasing military activity in space raises the specter of an arms race, in which major powers compete with one another for military superiority, with potentially dire effects for international security and the long-term sustainability of the space environment.

The core question before this committee is not whether the current situation is sustainable (there is broad consensus that it is not) — but how to design governance mechanisms that are effective, equitable, and capable of gaining the support of both established and emerging spacefaring nations.

Key Areas of Concern:

[7]***1. Space Traffic Management****:* The pace of launches into space has increased dramatically over the last decade, and continues to rise, driven primarily by satellite internet **megaconstellations**[8], smallsats (or small satellites)[9], and other commercial payloads[10]. For example, in **2024 there were 259 orbital launches worldwide**, setting a new record for annual launch attempts.[11] This dramatic increase in launches has been driven by changes in the economics and technology

---

[3] Satellites orbit Earth, and they use **radio frequencies** to send and receive signals (like internet, GPS, or TV) back to Earth and to other satellites.

[4] Larsen, Paul B., *Solving the Space Debris Crisis*, *Journal of Air Law and Commerce*, 2018, https://scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4092&context=jalc.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Space Exploration Technologies Corp., *Falcon 9 Overview*, https://web.archive.org/web/20101222155322/http://www.spacex.com/falcon9.php.

[7] *The Economist*, "Ransomware attacks like the one that hit Colonial Pipeline are increasingly common," *The Economist (graphic detail)*, May 10, 2021, https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/05/10/ransomware-attacks-like-the-one-that-hit-colonial-pipeline-are-increasingly-common.

[8] Megaconstellations are very large networks of satellites operating together in low Earth orbit (LEO) to provide global services like internet, communications, or Earth observation.

[9] Smallsats are artificial satellites typically defined by a wet mass (including propellant) of less than 500 kg (1,100 lbs), often featuring lower manufacturing costs and faster development cycles compared to traditional satellites.

[10] A payload in space is the specific instrument, cargo, or equipment a rocket or spacecraft carries to fulfill its primary mission objectives

[11] *Space Foundation*, *The Space Report 2024 Q4 Shows Record Annual Launches, Strong H2 Market Performance, and Growing Demand for Tracking and Removal of Orbital Debris*, 21 January 2025, https://www.spacefoundation.org/2025/01/21/the-space-report-2024-q4/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

of spaceflight. Up until relatively recently, almost all launches to space were conducted by government agencies, for the purpose of scientific research, intelligence gathering, or to support military operations. Private companies did launch satellites, but they were a small proportion of overall space activity. The growth of commercial spaceflight in the last two decades changed this picture. In America, presidents Bush and Obama privatized the launch industry in an effort to find a cheaper platform to replace the aging **Space Shuttle**, while China sought to match up to the US in space launch by increasing its own launch numbers, and the Russian and Indian space agencies competed on the international market as low-cost providers.

These economic changes spurred technological changes. In 2010, **SpaceX**, an American startup, created the **Falcon 9**, a rocket of its own design, in an effort to provide launches at a lower cost than existing providers.[2] Beginning in 2013, they began a program to land Falcon 9 rockets and reuse them, in order to drive down costs further. These efforts reduced launch costs enormously, with the first Falcon 9 flights costing only 50 million dollars[12] (compared to about 450 million for the **Space Shuttle**), and **reusability** (i.e., recovering and reusing launch vehicle components to reduce costs and increase launch frequency) has reportedly dropped internal costs to about 28 million. Beginning in 2019, the company began launching their own **Starlink** telecommunications satellites, taking advantage of low launch costs to create a massive megaconstellation to provide satellite internet.[13]

As of early 2026, Starlink operates approximately 9,400 satellites, constituting nearly two-thirds of all active satellites globally, and the Federal Communications Commission has approved SpaceX to deploy up to 15,000 satellites, with applications filed for nearly 30,000.[14] Competitors have taken interest in this business model. Amazon Leo is deploying 3,236-satellite constellations in April 2025 and has launched over 200 satellites to date, with service anticipated in 2026.[15] **Eutelsat OneWeb, a London based and European backed group fields a constellation of over 600 satellites**.[16] China is developing several competing megaconstellations of its own, including the state-backed SpaceSail constellation, which plans to deploy nearly 15,000 satellites.[17]

Increased launch numbers have already led to problems in **Space Traffic Management** and international coordination. In August 2020, a satellite operated by the **European Space Agency** (ESA) was reportedly forced to take evasive maneuvers when the operators realized that its orbit had a one-in-one-thousand chance of colliding with a Starlink satellite (the maximum accepted risk under ESA guidelines is one in ten thousand). Operators at Starlink had refused to move their satellite, later citing problems with their internal paging system for their slow response.[18] In December 2021, the government of China sent a note to UNCOPUOS accusing the United States of

---

[12] Space Exploration Technologies Corp. "Falcon 9 Overview." *SpaceX*, archived December 22, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20101222155322/http://www.spacex.com/falcon9.php.

[13] *Space Foundation*, *The Space Report 2024 Q4 Shows Record Annual Launches, Strong H2 Market Performance, and Growing Demand for Tracking and Removal of Orbital Debris*, 21 January 2025, https://www.spacefoundation.org/2025/01/21/the-space-report-2024-q4/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[14] *CNBC*, *FCC Approves SpaceX Plan to Deploy 7,500 Starlink Satellites*, January 10, 2026, https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/10/fcc-approves-spacex-plan-to-deploy-7500-starlink-satellites.html.

[15] *Satellite Today*, *Amazon Leo Readies 200+ Satellites for Orbit as It Ramps Up Launch Schedule*, March 23, 2026, https://www.satellitetoday.com/connectivity/2026/03/23/amazon-leo-readies-200-satellites-for-orbit-as-it-ramps-up-launch-schedule/.

[16] Erica Marchand, *Eutelsat Orders 340 New OneWeb LEO Satellites from Airbus*, January 13, 2026, https://www.spacewar.com/reports/Eutelsat_orders_340_new_OneWeb_LEO_satellites_from_Airbus_999.html.

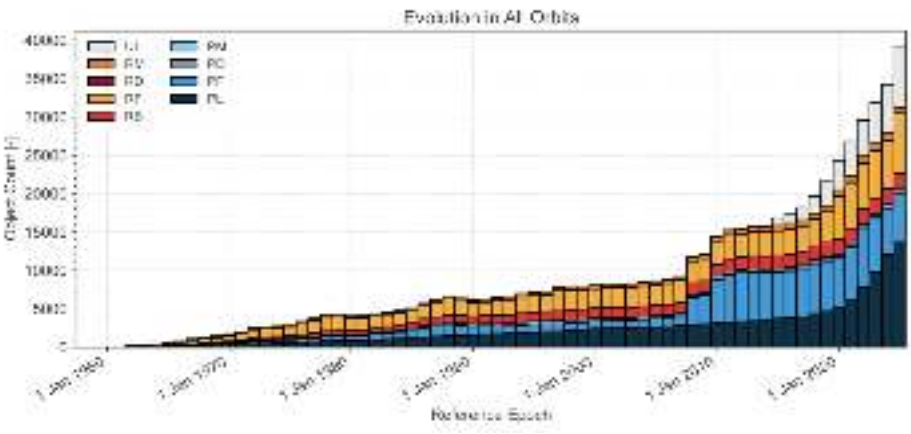
[17] *Reuters*, *China Launches First Satellites of Constellation to Rival Starlink*, August 5, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/china-launches-first-satellites-constellation-rival-starlink-newspaper-reports-2024-08-05/.

[18] Jones, Andrew, *China's Space Station Maneuvered to Avoid Starlink Satellites*, *SpaceNews*, December 28, 2021, https://spacenews.com/chinas-space-station-maneuvered-to-avoid-starlink-satellites/.

violating international law and endangering the lives of Chinese astronauts, after two incidents earlier that year in which a Chinese space station had to maneuver to avoid Starlink satellites.[19] Again in December 2025, China reported another near-miss between one of its satellites and a Starlink satellite, and that same month a Starlink satellite exploded in orbit, ejecting dozens of pieces of debris.[20]

These incidents illustrate a core **governance gap**: there is currently no binding international framework requiring satellite operators to coordinate collision avoidance, share tracking data, or follow common "rules of the road." The U.S. Department of Commerce has begun trials of a new Space Traffic Coordination System (TraCSS) that combines data from private companies with Defense Department capabilities, but it remains a domestic effort (not an international one).[21]**Various actors — including the European Union, the ITU, and UNOOSA — have called for the development of a global Space Traffic Management framework, but as of 2026, no binding international agreement on STM exists.**

***2. Space Debris*:** Space debris refers, "defunct, human-made objects orbiting Earth, including dead satellites, spent rocket stages, and fragmentation debris,".[22] Levels of space debris have increased in recent years. A collision with an object larger than ten centimeters is likely to cause the complete disintegration of the spacecraft.[23] **Whipple shields** made of multiple layers of metal and Kevlar can protect crew compartments and other important parts of a spacecraft against objects below one centimeter, but anything above that requires a spacecraft to maneuver to avoid the object.[24] Currently, there are over 30,000 tracked objects larger than 10 cm, along with millions of smaller, untrackable particles, all orbiting at approximately 10 km/s.[25] A key debris mitigation rule is to restrict the time objects spend orbiting in space after the mission; the inter-agency space debris coordination committee has set the limit for 25 years for the Low Earth Orbit (space surrounding at altitudes roughly between 160 and 2000 km). According to the European Space Agency (ESA), around 40-70% of payload (specific cargo or equipment a rocket or spacecraft carries to fulfil its mission) mass sticks to the 25-year limit. However, there is a general consensus that existing guidelines and compliance measures remain insufficient as the overall growth in orbital activity has expedited over the years and is far outpacing compliance. European Space Agency's (ESA) latest annual space report highlights that, given the current state of affairs, "even in the case of **no further launches** into the orbit, it is expected that collisions among the space debris objects already present will lead to a further growth in space debris population (i.e. Kessler Syndrome) in Low Earth Orbit (space surrounding at altitudes roughly between 160 and

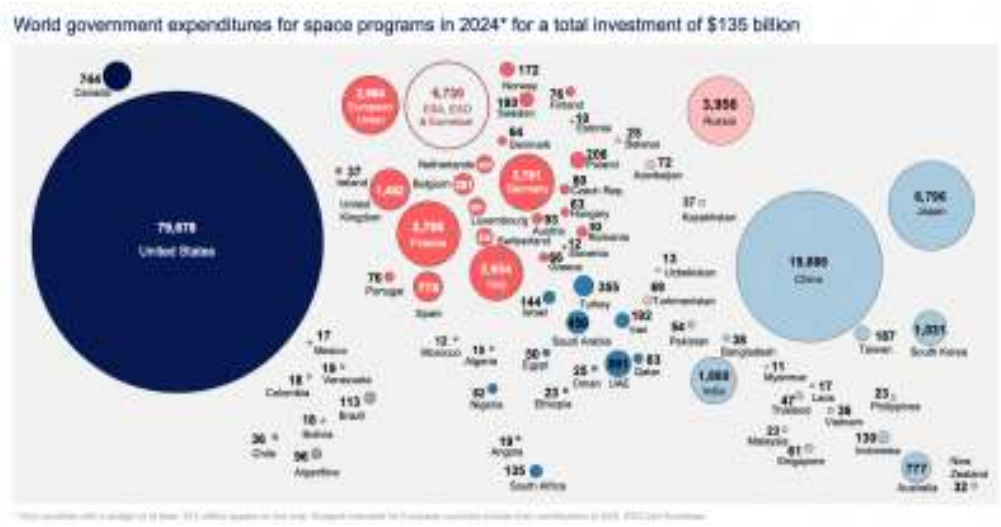


[19] Space Foundation, *The Space Report 2024 Q4*, January 21, 2025, https://www.spacefoundation.org/2025/01/21/the-space-report-2024-q4/.
[20] *Ars Technica*, *Starlink Satellite Breaks Apart into "Tens of Objects"; SpaceX Confirms Anomaly*, March 2026, https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/03/starlink-satellite-breaks-apart-into-tens-of-objects-spacex-confirms-anomaly/.
[21] *U.S. Department of Commerce, Traffic Coordination System for Space (TraCSS)*, https://space.commerce.gov/commerce-departments-new-traffic-coordination-system-for-space-launches-initial-capabilities/.
[22] *European Space Agency (ESA), Space Debris FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions*, https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Space_Debris/Space_Debris_FAQ_Frequently_asked_questions.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), The Threat of Orbital Debris and Protecting NASA Space Assets from Satellite Collisions*, April 28, 2009, http://images.spaceref.com/news/2009/ODMediaBriefing28Apr09-1.pdf.
[25] *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Orbital Debris Frequently Asked Questions*, https://orbitaldebris.jsc.nasa.gov/faq/.

2000 km)."[26] The **Inter-Agency Space Debris Guidelines**, adopted by the COPUOS in 2007 are voluntary and non-binding, however some nations choose to implement them within domestic law, including the United States, China, and Russia among other countries. Also, the European Space Agency implemented a **Zero Debris** approach and updated its **Space Debris Mitigation Standard,** which reduced the post-mission lifetime from 25 to 5 years.[27] While the former is not binding, the Standard is mandatory and applies to all missions operated by the ESA. ESA has 23 member states including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK, among others.

Other binding international treaties such as the 1979 Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, were established before debris was recognized as a significant concern. Having said that, a significant portion of the debris in space is also from past space activities and there is no multilateral incentive to address that issue.

Under current international law, the nation that launches a spacecraft retains ownership of it, even after it ceases to operate. Anyone removing old satellites from orbit would need to track down current owners and get permission, or removing them would amount to an act of aggression against the nation that launched the satellite.[28]More importantly, removing defunct satellites from orbit is expensive, and no nation or operator has a clear incentive to pay for removal. Space debris has been described by a variety of experts as a **tragedy of the commons**, i.e. an economic issue in which every participant in an economy would benefit if the group could modify its behavior, but no individual has an incentive to change their behavior.[29]



[30]

***3. Perspectives of Spacefaring and Non-Spacefaring Nations*:** Spacefaring nations refer to those with independent capacity to launch and operate satellites or conduct human spaceflight. While many nations are considered "space-enabled" or "emerging spacefaring," meaning they may collaborate with other countries to launch satellites, only a select few are considered spacefaring. There are also countries with no space capacity. Examples of spacefaring nations include, US, Russia, and China. Emerging space nations include India, Japan, South Korea, and France. Note that these categories are not always rigid; some states possess independent launch capabilities but are still considered "emerging" due to the scale, frequency, or scope of their space activities.

Any effective governance framework for outer space must account for the fact that the roughly 193 member states of the United Nations do not engage with space equally. According to some **UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDR)** articles and sources, increasing space activity poses various challenges for nations which are not investing in

---

[26] *European Space Agency (ESA), Space Environment Report 2025*, 2025, https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Space_Debris/Space_Environment_Report_2025.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Larsen, Ibid.
[29] *Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES),* image from *Solving the Space Junk Problem*, May 25, 2020, https://cires.colorado.edu/news/solving-space-junk-problem.
[30] *SpaceNews*, image from *Defense Spending Propels Government Space Budgets to New Heights*, January 15, 2025, https://spacenews.com/defense-spending-propels-government-space-budgets-to-new-heights/.

space. These challenges are particularly acute because many of these states rely on space-based services like communication, navigation, and disaster response, despite having limited space infrastructure. This creates dependence on systems controlled by more advanced spacefaring countries, which can make access less secure. At the same time, growing congestion in orbit and space debris make it harder and more expensive for these countries to develop their own capabilities.[31]

Spacefaring states have often expressed caution toward adopting binding rules that could limit their operational flexibility, while at the same time supporting the development of norms and regulations that would help manage the activities of other actors in space. The United States developed the **Artemis Accords,** a set of non binding guidelines for a peaceful and successful exploration of the moon and other celestial bodies, based on the 1967 outer space treaty. While the Accords have been praised for encouraging international cooperation and for operationalizing the principles of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty through a set of practical guidelines, they have also been criticized for being developed outside UN-led multilateral frameworks, and for interpreting space resource extraction as consistent with the 1967 Treaty despite ongoing legal debate on the matter, and for reflecting a U.S.-centric approach, as noted by several other major spacefaring states, like **Russia**.[32]

Russia's space program, **Roscosmos**, is focusing on developing and strengthening human spaceflight and military space capabilities. Additionally, Russia is working with China, another major spacefaring nation, to construct a power plant in space for the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS).The ILRS is a **proposed long-term lunar base initiative** led primarily by **China and Russia**, aimed at building a **research station on or near the Moon** in stages over the next few decades.[33] The China-Russian ILRS initiative is seen by many as a strategic partnership to neutralize the west's growing influence in space. The ILRS and Artemis Accords exemplify coalition-based frameworks that highlight gaps in existing international space law.

Russia and China have consistently supported the **Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)**, a UN resolution. In fact, they have also argued for it to be translated into a binding treaty and submitted a draft treaty to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (CD). **The US has opposed this proposed treaty. Russia and China's support has also drawn criticism, with critics pointing to their anti-satellite (ASAT) testing—tools or missiles designed to destroy or disable other satellites in space—and noting that the resulting debris can accidentally damage or destroy other satellites, thereby going against efforts to prevent an arms race in space**.[34] Also, the (proposed) treaty on prevention of the placement of weapons in Outer Space (PPWT) contains loopholes within this context, it fails to define what constitutes a weapon, its use, and how to distinguish between accident and "intentional acts of aggression."[35]

While much of the debate is driven by major powers, a wider range of countries are beginning to assert their perspectives in space governance discussions, albeit with more limited influence. **Emerging spacefaring countries** like India, the UAE, Brazil, and South Korea generally support stronger space governance, but they are wary of frameworks that could reinforce existing inequalities. **India** is a particularly illustrative case. India has consistently supported the proposed treaty

[31]Ibid.

[32] *SpaceNews*, image from *Defense Spending Propels Government Space Budgets to New Heights*, January 15, 2025, https://spacenews.com/defense-spending-propels-government-space-budgets-to-new-heights/.

[33] *Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES),* image from *Solving the Space Junk Problem*, May 25, 2020, https://cires.colorado.edu/news/solving-space-junk-problem.

[34]Britt, Brian, *The PPWT and Ongoing Challenges to Arms Control in Space*, *Joint Force Quarterly*, Issue 113 (2nd Quarter 2024), 2024, https://digitalcommons.ndu.edu/joint-force-quarterly/vol113/iss1/13..

[35] Ibid.

on the prevention of arms race and has also signed onto the Artemis Accords reflecting its strategic autonomy and efforts to balance cooperation between major spacefaring nations.[36] At the other end of the spectrum, countries without space programs are nonetheless heavily dependent on space-based services while having little say in or responsibility for the debris and congestion that threaten those systems. Non-spacefaring (and even emerging) nations have consistently emphasized that access to space should be equitable, alongside shared capacity-building programs.[37]

In addition to countries, the growing role of **private companies** such as SpaceX and Blue Origin has further complicated governance frameworks. As explored above, these actors operate across national jurisdictions while shaping access to launch capabilities, satellite deployment, and space-based services. Their reliance on reusable rockets and, alongside states that increasingly support commercial space activity, focus on commercializing space, including sectors such as space tourism and related services. While international space frameworks primarily focus on countries, the 1967 treaty does outline that governments are responsible and liable for private companies licensed by them.[38]

PREVIOUS UN ACTION & THE PATH FORWARD:

The foundational layer of space law consists of five treaties negotiated under COPUOS during the Cold War. The **Outer Space Treaty** of 1967 remains the cornerstone, banning nuclear weapons in space, prohibiting territorial annexation of celestial bodies, and holding states liable for damage caused by objects they launch. It was followed by the **Rescue Agreement** (1968), the **Space Liability Convention** (1972), the **Registration Convention** (1976), and the **Moon Treaty** (1984).[39] [40] Since then, governance has operated primarily through voluntary frameworks. COPUOS endorsed voluntary **Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines** in 2007. Also, it has adopted the **21 Long-Term Sustainability (LTS) Guidelines** in 2019, following an eight-year long negotiation process with its member states. The guidelines cover policy and regulatory frameworks, safety of space operations, international cooperation, and scientific research. [41] Outside the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space framework, the U.S.-led Artemis Accords is a non-binding set of principles for civil space exploration. It has been signed by 61 countries as of the mid-2020s, but major spacefaring nations such as China and Russia have not joined.[42]

Additionally, with regards to concerns about an arms race and security issues, the UN General Assembly established an **Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Reducing Space Threats** in 2021; it met across four sessions in 2022 and 2023. Despite substantive discussions on various security issues including ASAT testing, the group failed to reach a consensus on the final report, Russia and China opposed the final text, further illustrating how growing political divisions are blocking progress on space security.[43] Also, in 2022, the United States introduced a resolution calling on all states to ban ASAT testing; while the resolution passed, like other UN resolutions, it is non-binding.

---

[36] *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, Shaping Space Governance: Strategic Reflections on Multilateralism, International Law, and the Role of Emerging States*, September 18, 2025, https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/strategic-reflections-shaping-space-governance.

[37] *United Nations Department of Global Communications, Outer Space Must Be a Place for Peace and Cooperation, Not an Arms Race*, GA/SPD/788, 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaspd788.doc.htm.

[38] *The Regulatory Review, Saturday Seminar: Regulating Commercial Space Activity*, June 6, 2020, https://www.theregreview.org/2020/06/06/saturday-seminar-regulating-commercial-space-activity/.

[39] *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), United Nations Treaties and Principles on Outer Space*, https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/publications/STSPACE11E.pdf.

[40] Notably, the Moon Treaty has never been ratified by any major spacefaring nation, and no new binding multilateral space treaty has entered into force since 1984 — a gap of over four decades during which the pace of space activity has accelerated dramatically.

[41] [4] United Nations Information Service, *Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities of the Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Adopted*, UNIS/OS/518, June 21, 2019, https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/informationfor/media/2019-unis-os-518.html. See also Peter Martinez, *The UN COPUOS Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities*, *Journal of Space Safety Engineering*, 2021, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2468896721000094.

[42] National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), *Artemis Accords*, https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/.

[43] *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), United Nations Treaties and Principles on Outer Space*, https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/publications/STSPACE11E.pdf.

What this committee must address is whether today's mix of voluntary guidelines and fragmented institutions is enough for an ***era of megaconstellations, commercial actors, and rising great-power competition***. Current rules were designed for a small number of government satellites, not for today's crowded orbit with over 10,000 Starlink satellites, and rising debris risks that ESA models suggest are already trending toward unsustainable levels. In this context, delegates should think about what mix of binding and voluntary rules, institutional reforms, and equity measures could realistically gain broad support, and what the ***cost of continued inaction would be***.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does your country have an active space program? If so, what are its priorities — commercial, scientific, military, or a combination? How does this shape your country's position on binding governance frameworks?
2. Does your country rely on space-based services such as GPS, satellite communications, or Earth observation for agriculture, disaster response, or national security? How would disruption of these services affect your population?
3. What is your country's position on the debate between voluntary guidelines and binding treaty obligations? Does your country believe the existing voluntary framework is sufficient, or does it support stronger enforcement mechanisms?
4. How does your country view the principle of common but differentiated responsibility as applied to space governance — particularly regarding who should bear the costs of debris cleanup and compliance with new rules?
5. Has your country signed the Artemis Accords? If so, what does that signal about your alignment in the broader governance debate? If not, what are the reasons, and what alternative frameworks does your country support?
6. What is your country's position on anti-satellite weapons? Has it conducted or opposed ASAT tests? Does it support the UNGA resolution calling for a moratorium on destructive ASAT testing?
7. What role should non-spacefaring and developing nations play in shaping space governance? How can their interests be represented in frameworks that are currently dominated by the major spacefaring powers?

Glossary:

- **Satellite:** Satellites do things like provide **GPS navigation, weather forecasting, TV and internet signals, and Earth monitoring**. They are built and launched by **governments (like NASA or ESA), private companies (like SpaceX), and sometimes universities**, and their use of space is coordinated internationally by the International Telecommunication Union to avoid conflicts in orbit and communication signals.
- **Payload:** the specific instrument, cargo, or equipment a rocket or spacecraft carries to fulfill its primary mission objectives.
- **Space Debris:** Any object in orbit around Earth that no longer serves a function, including defunct satellites, rocket stages, and fragments from collisions or explosions.
- **Anti-Satellite Weapon (ASAT):** A weapon designed to destroy or disable satellites. Current systems include ground and air-launched missiles, lasers, microwave beams, jamming systems, and cyberattacks.
- **Artemis Accords:** A set of non-binding bilateral agreements between the United States and partner nations, launched in 2020, establishing principles for the civil exploration and use of the Moon, Mars, and other celestial bodies. As of January 2026, 61 countries have signed.
- **Conference on Disarmament (CD):** The primary multilateral forum for negotiating arms control treaties, based in Geneva. Handles discussions on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS).
- **Defunct Spacecraft:** A satellite or spacecraft that is no longer in active use.
- **European Space Agency (ESA):** An intergovernmental organization founded in 1975, coordinating space activities across European member states.
- **Global Positioning System (GPS):** A constellation of navigation satellites operated by the United States, providing accurate location data globally.
- **Graveyard Orbit:** An orbit above normal satellite operating altitudes where defunct satellites are moved at the end of their service life to reduce collision risk.
- **Interagency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC):** An international committee of 13 space agencies, formed in 1993, which coordinates debris mitigation efforts and published the first international debris mitigation guidelines in 2002.

- **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS):** A proposed long-term lunar base initiative led by China and Russia, aimed at establishing a permanent research presence on or near the Moon.
- **International Space Station (ISS):** A space station built between 1998 and 2000 as a collaboration between American, Russian, European, Japanese, and Canadian space agencies.
- **International Telecommunication Union (ITU):** The UN agency responsible for allocating radio frequencies and orbital slots for satellites, operating on a first-come, first-served basis.
- **Kessler Syndrome:** A proposed phenomenon in which space debris collides with spacecraft, creating more debris, which causes more collisions, in a self-sustaining cascade that could render entire orbital bands unusable.
- **Long-Term Sustainability (LTS) Guidelines:** A set of 21 voluntary, non-binding guidelines adopted by COPUOS in 2019, covering policy frameworks, safety of operations, international cooperation, and scientific research for the sustainable use of outer space.
- **Megaconstellation:** An extremely large constellation of satellites, typically numbering in the thousands, generally intended to provide telecommunications or internet services.
- **Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Reducing Space Threats:** A UN body established by General Assembly resolution 76/231 in 2021, which met across four sessions in 2022–2023 to discuss norms, rules, and principles of responsible behavior in space. It failed to reach consensus on a final report.
- **Outer Space Treaty (OST):** The 1967 foundational treaty of international space law, prohibiting nuclear weapons in space, banning territorial annexation of celestial bodies, and holding states liable for objects they launch.
- **Passivation:** The process of rendering a defunct spacecraft safe by releasing fuel, discharging batteries, and taking other measures to prevent explosion.
- **Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS):** A longstanding UN General Assembly resolution calling for the prevention of an arms race in space, supported by China and Russia who have advocated for a binding treaty version.
- **Reusability:** The ability to use rocket components for more than one launch, most notably demonstrated by SpaceX's Falcon 9 landings, which dramatically reduced launch costs.
- **Space Situational Awareness (SSA):** The collection and analysis of data on objects in space to identify potential threats to operational spacecraft.
- **Space Traffic Management (STM):** Technical and regulatory measures intended to manage objects traveling through space and prevent collisions. No binding international STM framework currently exists.
- **Starlink:** A large megaconstellation of telecommunications satellites operated by SpaceX, consisting of over 10,000 active satellites as of early 2026.
- **Tragedy of the Commons:** An economic concept describing situations where individual actors, acting in their own self-interest, deplete a shared resource to the detriment of all. Widely used to describe the space debris problem.
- **UN Office of Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA):** The primary UN agency dealing with space issues, serving as the secretariat for COPUOS and providing technical and legal assistance to member states.
- **Whipple Shield:** A composite shield made of Kevlar and thin metal plates, designed to protect spacecraft from debris impacts below one centimeter in size.
  United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS): The main UN body responsible for space governance, first established in 1958. It operates by consensus and currently has 102 member states.

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND RESOLUTIONS

Outer Space Treaty (1967) The foundational treaty of international space law. Prohibits nuclear weapons in space, bans territorial claims on celestial bodies, and holds states liable for damage caused by their space objects.
https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html

Rescue Agreement (1968) Requires states to assist astronauts in distress and return them safely to their launching state.
https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introrescueagreement.html

Space Liability Convention (1972) Establishes liability and compensation frameworks for damage caused by space objects. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introliability-convention.html

Registration Convention (1976) Requires states to register objects launched into space with the United Nations. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introregistration-convention.html

Moon Treaty (1984) Extends the principles of the Outer Space Treaty to the Moon and other celestial bodies. Not ratified by any major spacefaring nation. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/intromoon-agreement.html

UN Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines (2007) Voluntary guidelines endorsed by COPUOS, based on IADC standards, covering debris minimization, passivation, and end-of-life disposal.
https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/publications/st_space_49E.pdf

COPUOS Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines (2019) Twenty-one voluntary, non-binding guidelines adopted by COPUOS after an eight-year negotiation process, covering policy frameworks, safety of operations, international cooperation, and scientific research. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/informationfor/media/2019-unis-os-518.html

Artemis Accords (2020–present) Non-binding bilateral agreements between the United States and partner nations establishing principles for civil space exploration. 61 signatories as of January 2026. China and Russia have not signed.
https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/

UNGA Resolution 76/231 — Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours (2021) Established the Open-Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats, which met across four sessions in 2022–2023 but failed to reach consensus on a final report.
https://meetings.unoda.org/open-ended-working-group-on-reducing-space-threats-2022

UNGA Resolution 77/41 — Destructive Direct-Ascent Anti-Satellite Missile Testing (2022) Called upon all states to commit not to conduct destructive direct-ascent ASAT missile tests. Passed 155–9 with 9 abstentions. Non-binding.
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3996915

Draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT) A draft treaty submitted by China and Russia to the Conference on Disarmament, proposing to ban the placement of weapons in outer space. Opposed by the United States and not adopted. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/psa/psa.html

Position Paper Guidelines:

In order to be eligible for a committee award, delegations must submit one (1) position paper per country (i.e. if two delegates are representing the United States, they will only submit one position paper between the two of them).

What is a Position Paper?
A position paper is a short document that outlines a country's opinion on an issue. The paper includes a short summary of what the issue or problem is, explains why the country is interested in the issue, and communicates the country's stance on what should be done to address the issue. A position paper is written as if you were the actual representative of the country stating its position. Your personal opinions on the issue should not be included. A position paper is not a summary of your country's GDP, government, economy, languages, etc. unless directly relevant to the issue. Only one position paper is written per country, per grade school committee; **if there are 2 or 3 delegates representing the same country on a committee, they should write the paper together**.

Why write a Position Paper?
Writing a position paper will help you organize why an issue matters to your country and what your country wants done on the issue. The first thing you will likely do in committee is present an opening speech about your country's position. You should be able to pull portions of a well written position paper into an introductory speech on your

country's perspective.

How to Write a Position Paper

(1) Research the Issue. The questions you want to answer are:
- How does this issue affect your country?
- How does this issue affect your country's neighbors or allies?
- Is this a global problem that impacts everyone?
- What would your country like to see done on this issue?
- Are there countries or groups of people who will be particularly sensitive to addressing this issue?
- Are there any conventions or resolutions on the topics that your country has signed or ratified?
- What are UN actions on the issue? Has your country supported or opposed these actions?
- Keep in Mind: What a country says, and what it actually believes should be done may be different. Also, some countries may believe that no action should be taken on an issue. They may disagree with how others feel or may not want international involvement. It is okay if your position is that the international community should do nothing, but you will need to explain why.

(2) Brainstorm Specific Actions. Come up with 3-4 specific things that can be done to reach the outcome your country desires. For example: "The United States believes we should send a peacekeeping mission to monitor human rights abuses in Syria and encourage talks between both sides." You will present these ideas in committee as possible solutions to the problem and attempt to pass a resolution which includes these actions.

(3) Outline Your Paper. Make an outline of what points you want to cover in your paper and the order in which you would like to address them. Remember a good paper should briefly explain the problem, explain why your country cares about the issue, and inform others what your country should like to see done. If you know other countries favor a solution that you will disagree with, make sure to include why your country disagrees.

(4) Write your Paper. Position papers should be written from the perspective of the country you are representing. Rather than being a report on the topic, a position paper should explain what your country wants to see done to address the issue. Start by giving a brief summary of the issue and how it impacts your country. Then explain the specific actions you would like to see taken. Close by summarizing your country's overall position. Proper grammar and spelling are a must.

Award Criteria and Eligibility

- The ideal position paper will have a clearly defined and summarized topic with your country's position clearly outlined. Points are also awarded for organization, style and correct grammar.
- GCDC Staff will be fact checking position papers, so be sure to include the most up to date information and a bibliography (if using in text citations, a Works Cited page MUST be included)
  - Proper source citation: if an idea or quote came from another source, you must provide a footnote / citation.
- Papers will be disqualified if the conference staff has discovered that students did not write their own papers or that content has been plagiarized.
- **Make sure your position paper must have the required header below! Do not create any additional title pages - points will be deducted for improper format.**
- **Formatting Requirements: 500 words minimum, 1,500 words maximum. Times New Roman font, 12- point size**

Required Position Paper Header

Committee:
Country:
Topic:
School:
Delegate Name(s):